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CAPITOL SPOTLIGHT
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"CRISIS IN EDUCATION"

Last week a federal commission made a desperate effort to alert us to the crisis in education in America. The Commission declared, "Our nation is at risk...if an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war."

Many of our nation's most compelling problems are directly related to the declining ability of our students to master essential skills. It is no mere coincidence that Japan has surpassed us in many economic areas and also requires of its school children substantially greater training in science and mathematics than we do.

Many Americans want to know "who is to blame?" The responsibility for our current problems must be shared by many parties. First and foremost, I blame both the federal and state governments for supplying insufficient funds for quality education. During the past decade in California, we have seen per capita funding for education drop from first in the nation to last. We see the results in college entrance scores, performance on civil service exams, and the job performance of our poorly educated young workers.

Some administrators and teachers are at fault. They have allowed the curriculum to drift too far from essential subjects and too close to marginal subjects popular with students.

The ordinary citizen has too often put his short-term monetary concerns ahead of the nation's best interest. For years, school districts across the country have found it almost impossible to pass a ballot measure for school bonds or a school tax override.

We cannot have it both ways. We cannot scrimp and save every last penny in the education budget and also expect to attract high-quality teachers and to maintain top-notch schools.

Parents are also often at fault. Many parents pay little or no attention to their child's school work. They allow Jimmy or Jane to take whatever courses the youngster feels will be most fun. They review with indifference their children's mediocre report cards. Rather than set limits which guarantee time and energy for school work, some parents actively participate with their children in a leisure time schedule of endless television, video games, and excursions.

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Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education was that the Commission made no new suggestions for a "quick fix". The prestigious Commission made precisely the same recommendations that people concerned about education have been making for years.

The recommended stiffer high school graduation requirements. They demanded more English, math, and science. They called for tougher grading. The Commission called for a substantial boost in the number of hours in class per school year. (Our kids spend less time in school than any children in the industrialized world.) Finally, they made the oldest and soundest recommendation of all: better paid and better trained teachers.

I will continue my efforts in Congress on behalf of better education. Education is not merely a system for turning out people to fit into the job force. It is a method for transmitting to the young the cultural, scientific, and intellectual heritage of the human race. It should be our country's top priority.

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